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SUBJECT: Special Media Reaction: Ambassador's January 10
Speech to the American Chamber of Commerce on Peace Process

REFTELS: A) Colombo 2166 (2005) B) Colombo 0054

11. (U) Summary: English and Sinhala media January 11 ran bold front-page headlines and lead stories highlighting Ambassador's January 10 speech to the American Chamber of Commerce in which he noted that peace should be the nation's highest priority, criticized recent LTTE violence and lauded the GOSL's restrained response to LTTE attacks. Mainstream and pro-LTTE internet news pages also published excerpts from the speech. The business sections of local papers also played the story up, emphasizing the Ambassador's assertion to the business community that a potential Free Trade Agreement with the US should not be the primary focus of the GSL and the Sri Lankan business community, but that instead Sri Lanka should focus on increasing overall trade and playing a more helpful role in concluding the WTO Doha Round in 2006. TV news on main channels did not run related stories, but radio stations added speech as main news item in their news reports. End Summary.

12. (U) Government-owned English Daily News and Sinhala newspaper Dinamina bannered in large font, "America warns Tigers." Mainstream independent Daily Mirror and Sinhala counterpart Lankadeepa led with, "U.S. gives tough warning to LTTE." The Sinhala nationalist Island, and its sister Sinhala paper Divaina bannered, "US: Return to war at high cost." The independent Lakbima, the only Sinhala paper without an English counterpart, did not carry the story. Mainstream Lanka Business Online and Lanka Academic prominently featured the speech as well. The Financial Times, published with the Daily Mirror, bannered, "Lanka missing 'US investment' bus: Ambassador Lunstead tells Lanka not to bank too much on FTA but improve conditions to draw FDI."

13. (U) Pro-LTTE media emphasized the consequences of war according to the Ambassador's statement. Government-owned Tamil daily Thinakaran led with "If the Tigers go back to war there could be serious effects, warns America," and Independent Tamil daily Thinakkural bannered, "If the Tigers go back to war it will have to face a very strong military, warns America." Pro-LTTE newspaper Sudar Oli ignored the statement, while Tamil Net, an organ of the LTTE, underplayed the speech, with a weak headline, "US wants cost of return to war to be high." Popular independent Tamil newspaper Virakesari ignored the speech altogether.

14. (U) Comment: Bold, front-page coverage of the Ambassador's remarks to the Colombo business community indicates the Sri Lankan media keenly follows every nuance of our position on the peace process. PD alerted all media to full text of speech posted immediately on mission web site. We will continue to monitor media for editorial reaction to the Ambassador's speech, which should appear in the coming days. The full text of the speech may be found at <http://srilanka.usembassy.gov/>. End Comment.

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